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Theory and research on the processes of early social learning in children has indicated that television and television commercials play an important role in children's internalization of cultural meanings, interpretations, and values, whether or not the commercials children see are intended for or directed at them. Between the ages of 2 and 18, the period in which social learning is most intense, American children see approximately 100,000 television commercials for beer. This study examined the cultural myths and messages present in a sample of 40 commercials representing 15 brands of beer which were broadcast on network television during 22 weekend daytime and evening hours in February and March of 1987. The relationships among beer, masculinity, and driving represented in the commercials were analyzed. The results of these analyses suggest that beer commercials promote not only a particular stereotypical view of what it means to be a man, but they also promote an association between drinking and driving. This association reflects and propagates values and attitudes implicated in drunk driving. Based on the conclusions of this research, it is recommended that the policy permitting the televising of commercials for beer be revised to prohibit such commercials. (Author/NB)

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Myths, Men & Beer

An analysis of beer commercials on broadcast television, 1987

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Abstract

Theory and research on the processes of early social learning in children indicate that television and television commercials play an important role in children's internalization of cultural meanings, interpretations, and values, whether or not the commercials children see are intended or directed at them. Between the ages of two and eighteen, the period in which social learning is most intense, American children see something like 100,000 television commercials for beer. This study examines the cultural myths and messages in a sample of 40 such commercials broadcast on network television during weekend daytime and evening hours in February and March of 1987, analyzes the relationships among beer, masculinity, and driving represented in those commercials, and discusses the implications of those relationships for children's attitudes toward beer drinking and driving.

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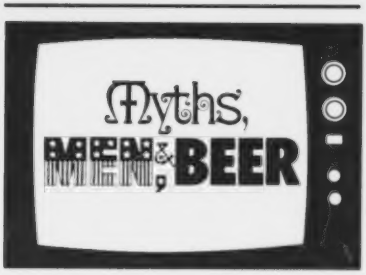


Introduction

I. Learning of Culture

In what is surely the most succinct definition of culture in anthropological literature, Edward Hall observes that "Culture is communication." By this he means two things. The first is that a culture is not merely a group of people who do things in a similar way, or share a common language, history, and technology. More important by far, a culture is a people who give similar meanings to their experience, and to the ways in which it is symbolized. What binds the members of a culture together, and sets them apart from others, is what Mary Douglas would call "rules of interpretation": a largely unconscious set of assumptions about how experience is to be understood and valued, and about how any one aspect of behavior — dress or table manners or beverage preference, for example — is related to every other element of culture — status, education, conceptions of masculinity, morality, success, etc. — in a dense web of meaning.

The second sense in which culture is communication is closely related to the first. If culture depends on shared meaning, then it also depends on means through which meaning may be shared. In particular, the propagation of culture depends on structures and media through which the young may learn the unconscious rules of interpretation which will bind them to one another and their elders in a particular community of meaning. Culture, in short, must be learned. But this does not mean that it must be taught — not, at least, in the sense that adults need consciously engage in some program for acculturating the young. True enough, no human infant comes into the world already knowing the rules and meanings of a particular culture. But every child is born with an awesome and largely uncontrollable capacity to abstract the salient features of its environment, identify patterns, and modify itself to the template its surroundings provide. We say a "largely uncontrollable" capacity because everything is grist for the human infant's patterning mill — those things which adults hope it will learn and equally those they in no wise intend to teach.

There is much we do not know about children's early learning — especially about the mysterious ways in which environment interacts with the "givens" of a particular infant's makeup, so that even "identical" twins raised in "identical" surroundings turn out distinctively different, individual, unique. But there is also much that we do know, beginning with the two generalizations we have already set forth, and which bear repeating here: Children come into the world with an astounding capacity to abstract the patterns — the rules and meanings — of their culture, and to shape themselves to those patterns. And that capacity for abstraction and learning works on and incorporates everything to which the child is exposed, whether it is intended for children or not. We also know that the child's learning of cultural rules and meanings is most indefatigable and potent during the period between birth and 7 or 8 years and continues at a slower rate through puberty, when the special kind of learning involved in acculturation seems to lose its drive, to be overshadowed by somewhat different, more "rational" cognitive processes. Why this should be so is something of a mystery. But it has been well demonstrated, particularly in the learning of language — that most important and complex system of cultural rules and meanings. For all its significance, however, language is only the most observable tip of the iceberg of cultural learning that is the primary product of infancy and childhood. Through much of the same unconscious, untaught processes, and at the same time as language is being learned, the child is also learning — for the most part irrevocably — how the people of the culture hold their bodies and faces and move about in space, and what subtle changes of distance, position, and expression mean; how the culture divides up time, and what the different rhythms of speech and movement signify; what it means to be masculine, and feminine, and good, smart, successful, "nice" — and how one "reads" the subtle gestures and movements and objects that say some people aren't. And none of this learning is emotionally neutral. To the contrary: it is, all of it, imbued with powerful feelings, because nothing less is at stake, in these early years, than the child's social survival. And in the long dependency period of human infancy and childhood, social survival is the only kind of survival there is.

We have said that the learning of culture in infancy and childhood is "largely irrevocable," in part because the feelings

attached to such learning are so strong. But there are several other reasons why early cultural learning is bedrock strong and almost impervious to change. For one, the kind of learning we are referring to is not a process in which children consciously engage. It occurs without their assent, their will, and even their awareness. Indeed, most of the cultural rules and meanings we act on automatically as adults are so invisible to our own view that we are unable to say what those rules are, or how we learned them, or when. In fact, the most potent generalizations of our culture, our most fundamental assumptions — about space, and time, and sexuality, and moral behavior, for example — are so thoroughly incorporated into our sense of what is real that we rarely recognize them as cultural learnings at all. Instead, we think of them as aspects of nature: they are simply "the way things are." In the terminology of semioticians like Roland Barthes, these great, unconscious assumptions of a culture, these lessons so well learned and profoundly buried that we think them part of nature, not part of us, are **myths**. A myth, in the sense we will use the word here, is not a cultural belief that is "false"; to the contrary, it is a belief so unconsciously and so widely and deeply accepted within a given culture that the question of its truth never comes up. And this accounts, in large measure, for the extraordinary resistance of myths to change.

Another factor in the imperviousness of early cultural learnings to subsequent change is the density of the fabric into which the strands of cultural meanings are woven. A culture is not, after all, merely a collection of practices and objects and signs, each with its own values and meanings. A culture is a whole, in which every sign and meaning is inextricably linked to every other: sex roles to dress, dress to education, education to moral conceptions, moral conceptions to child-rearing practices, and on and on and on. That is why conscious attempts to alter one cultural attitude, belief, or practice — the economic position of women, for example — are so often doomed to failure: one thread cannot easily be plucked from the fabric of culture without unraveling the whole.

The dense integration of practices, signs, and meanings that characterizes culture at the macroscopic level also characterizes culture as it is represented in the "self" of every individual. The process of learning one's culture is, in fact, a process of connecting one thing with another — of learning what goes with what: what sounds go with "feels good," what faces and gestures go with

"happy," what textures and smells and tastes and objects go with "warm" and "safe." The shuttle of cultural learning, one might say, is associations. And buried associations, thousands on thousands of them, almost all lost to consciousness, all but a few irretrievable by adult reflection, are the bases of "meaning."

II. Television and Social Learning

But through what sorts of experience does all this marvel of learning occur in the lives of children? Where does the "grist" for the child's ceaseless patterning mill come from? Here, too, we think we can begin to answer. Without doubt, the primary source of the child's social and cultural learning is engagements with "significant others" in shared social — usually shared physical — contexts. In the early days, weeks, and months of life, when the most fundamental associations are being laid down and the roots of meaning established, those persons, objects, and sensory experiences that affect the child's sense of well-being are the most potent sources of learning. It is no accident that the infant's largest and most fully developed sensory organ is the skin, for it is at the skin that the world impinges most directly on the child, and through touch that the first meanings are communicated.

The acculturation of children through direct social engagement with others is called "primary" for two reasons: not only because it is the earliest kind of social learning, but also because the unconscious meanings and interpretations learned through contact with others serve as "filters" through which all subsequent experiences pass and are attended to, generalized from, transformed, and incorporated into the unique world view of each individual. But such processes are not the only or even the most extensive sources of cultural learning in the years between birth and puberty. In addition to the skin, which allows us to learn through direct contact with others, we have eyes and ears, and they allow learning at a distance, through observation of others and **their** social and object engagements. And in the period from roughly two years until adolescence, these so-called "secondary" processes of social learning play an increasing part in the child's internalization of cultural meanings. This is the period in which the teletechnologies of a society assume a significant role in the social and cultural shaping of the young. Of particular import are those technologies that are

predominant in the contexts where children have easy and continuous access to them; and that emphasize, in their content, human faces, voices, and interactions. Television, of course, is the dominant medium of this kind in American society. It is found in almost every American home; it can be operated by children as young as fourteen months; it provides round-the-clock programming; it codifies information in relatively simple speech and in pictures which require no systematic teaching to "decode"; and it specializes in the human image and human interactions. Television is watched most intensively by the young, moreover, during just that period when their unconscious learning of cultural rules and meanings through observation is most furiously driven: between 18 months and 10-13 years. This is why television has been a subject of intense concern among scholars and laypersons alike. And while research on television "effects" has often generated more heat than light, it has also produced a handful of conclusions we can be sure of. Several of them deserve note here for their particular bearing on the process of early social learning and acculturation.

Probably the best-established facts on television and children concern the amount of time they devote to the medium. Estimates of children's viewing time vary somewhat, but we know that young children (ages 2-5) are the heaviest non-adult viewers, spending about 28 hours a week with television, with older children (ages 6-11) close behind (just under 28 hours).[1] Teens watch somewhat less than their younger brothers and sisters, but still put in roughly 24 hours a week before the set, with boys watching somewhat more than girls. These figures mean that the "average" American child will have clocked almost 6,000 hours with television **before entering school**, and roughly 23,000 hours by high school's end.[2] This is just about twice the amount of time the same youngsters will spend in school during their social-learning years, and more time than most will spend with their fathers. In fact, for many children in households where both parents work, the time they spend with television from age 2 to 18 will exceed the time they spend with both parents combined.

We noted earlier that children's cultural learning is largely "uncontrollable," in the sense that it operates on whatever experiences a child has access to, whether those experiences are intended for children or not. In light of that fact, it is important to underscore here that much of what children experience via television is not

designed for them or intentionally directed to them. But the symbolic form of television — the pictures, words, and sounds in which it represents "reality" — is no more difficult for the young to "decode" than are their primary social experiences, and so the issue of "intent" is largely irrelevant. We know that children watch television at much the same times as adults (with the exception of Saturday mornings and late nights). And they learn as much from "adult" programming as from "their own."

So far as the "effects" of television are concerned, the most reliable conclusion to be drawn from the welter of studies conducted over the past 25 years is this: the way in which television learning is incorporated into the thought-world and behavior of the child depends on the patterns of meaning and interpretation the child has already formulated through the primary processes we have referred to earlier. And it continues to be modified by the child's primary social experiences. That is why the "effects" on children of television violence, for example, are so various. We do know, however, that television is a particularly potent force in shaping children's cultural learning and social behavior when three circumstances coincide. First, television "messages" work most powerfully — i.e., are least moderated in their "effects" on children — when the child has relatively weak or little social experience in a given area. Children whose lives have seldom brought them into personal contact with Blacks and Jews, for example, tend to model their assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes more closely on the stereotyped images and values represented by television than do children with extensive direct experience with Jews and Blacks. Second, television "messages" are most powerful when they reinforce meanings already structured by the child's primary social experience. Thus children whose early home and peer experience has taught them that aggression is an acceptable means of dealing with frustration and anger are more likely than others to behave aggressively after viewing violent programs. Finally, television is most potent as a source of learning when its "messages" on a given theme are highly consistent across different types of programs, frequently repeated, and closely integrated with other cultural themes in a dense web of related associations and meanings.

Because of the way they coincide with another set of circumstances and issues in American culture at present, these conditions have raised special concern about the role of television in shaping

children's social learning in a particular area of preeminent cultural significance: namely, their learning of sex roles and, in particular, of what it means to be a man. The question is a pressing one, and not only because cultural assumptions about masculinity are directly related to assumptions about femininity, and thus are tied to a major issue on the American political agenda. It is also troublesome because the masculine sex role is linked to a variety of other problems confronting our society — alcoholism, drug abuse, and violence, to name just three. And it is a matter of particular concern because young boys are especially vulnerable to television "messages" about masculinity, for several reasons.

It has long been a fact of American social and economic life that children spend less time with their fathers than with their mothers and other female relatives during their formative years. In recent decades, moreover, rising divorce rates have led to a dramatic increase in single-parent households, and in an overwhelming majority of cases, the single parent is female. At the same time, changing patterns of work have resulted in a veritable revolution in child-rearing practices, such that ever-younger children, in ever-increasing numbers, are spending the largest part of their waking hours in the custody of professional and semi-professional infant and child-care providers, either at home or in infant schools, preschools, and after-school play centers. And the day-care industry is populated almost exclusively by females — as, of course, are the elementary school classrooms in which children spend the greatest part of their time between the ages of six and thirteen. What all this means is that during the critical years of social learning and acculturation, many children do not have a great deal of intimate and sustained contact with adult males. And as we have noted above, learning from secondary sources such as television is particularly powerful when the child's primary social experiences in some area are inconsistent and weak. It is also especially potent when the televised "messages" are strong — that is, consistent and frequently repeated. Whether television presents a consistent set of cultural meanings of masculinity is as yet open to question; in fact, it is a question that is central to this research, and on which we shall have something to say in our conclusions. But there is no doubt that television portrays "masculinity" frequently, and nowhere more frequently than in that form that constitutes the largest single category of programming on American broadcast television: the commercial. This is one reason why television commercials are a

target of vital concern among those who address themselves to children's social learning: the sheer weight of their numbers and the frequency of their repetition makes them a major source of cultural meanings. Just how major is not easy to grasp, because like anything else that is always present, the commercial tends to escape our conscious notice. For that reason it is worth pausing to cite a few figures here.

III. Television Commercials and Social Learning

Of the 28 hours the preschool child spends with television each week, roughly five hours are devoted to commercials. Not programs plus commercials. Just commercials. And in that time, the child will see something more than 1,000 commercial messages. Each week. This means that before they enter school, children aged 2 to 5 years will have seen roughly 240,000 commercial messages. And by high school's end, they will have seen close to one million — at a rate better than 1,000 per week.

The number of television commercials children see, in short, is overwhelming. But their quantity is only one cause for concern. Another is their ability to capture the attention of children in a way that their more commercially-jaded elders may find surprising. One of the best-documented findings of television research is that children pay closer attention to commercials than they do to the programming that surrounds. For the most part, this may be explained by their brevity, the "brightening" of sound in commercial spots, and the heightened pace of change in the visual content. (The average duration of a single image in non-commercial content is about 3.5 seconds; in commercials, it is about 2 seconds.) For perfectly good reasons of species survival, our perceptual systems are "programmed" to attend to change. Rapidly-changing sensory information, therefore, compels us to take notice more than does slower-paced change. But television commercials hold children's interest for another reason, too. Research on the attention infants and toddlers pay to human faces indicates that "smiling" faces hold the gaze of the very young more than do other configurations of expression, and that "happy" is the first non-verbal expression of feeling children recognize and discriminate in drawings and photographs of the human face. In sum, children respond to happy faces. And happy faces are what television commercials are about. Happy faces and Pepsi. Happy faces and McDonald's. Happy faces and

beer. At the most primitive level, that is how advertising does its work: by linking "happy" to specific types of human activity, and those activities to products. And it is through such chains of associations, repeated over and over again, that the cultural meanings of both products and activities are constructed and communicated to the young.

Having said something of how advertising works in the learning of culture, it is important to note here how it does **not** work. It would be a grave error to believe, for example, that advertising causes the people of a culture to behave as they do, in any but trivial ways (selecting Brand X, perhaps, over Brand Y). And it would be equally erroneous to suppose that advertisers **invent** the cultural myths their commercials embody. Advertising does not stand apart from the culture in which it functions. It is through and through a product of that culture, and totally integrated with and constrained by it. The creative director who designs a new campaign for a soft drink or bathroom cleanser has internalized more profoundly than most of us the rules and meanings of the culture, and projects them unconsciously upon the drawing board. But the creative is no more able than the rest of us to articulate why some combination of images "works," or where the idea that guided them came from. Of course, the finished productions of Madison Avenue are not simply the outcome of cultural intuition; they are carefully tested and refined against the responses of "the market." But their inspiration, their deep structures and patterns of images and meanings, come from a thousand unrecognized sources in the long history of a culture's practices and values, signs and associations.

This is not to say that commercials "merely" reflect a culture's myths and meanings. By embodying and repeating them, by projecting them over and over again in dozens of new forms, commercials also extend and perpetuate cultural assumptions, values, and attitudes. And by tying a culture's deepest myths and meanings to specific products and activities, commercials also provide the young with the means to enact, in their own lives, what their culture means by "good" and "beautiful" and "happy" and "male." Thus television advertising is deeply implicated in the perpetuation of a culture's meanings and practices, and their extension to the young. For that reason, it is both necessary and appropriate, when problems arise out of a culture's ways of doing and believing, to examine advertising's role in the system of meanings from which such problems come.

IV. Drinking, Driving, and Beer

In recent years, Americans have become increasingly concerned about drinking and driving, especially when the young are involved, because of the yearly toll it takes on the lives of young and old alike. Estimates of the percentage of highway fatalities in which alcohol is involved commonly run to 50%, and even those who dispute that figure — executives of major brewing companies, for example — grant that drunk driving is a massive problem, heightened, as one industry spokesman put it, "by the disproportionate share of results impacting on young people."[3] A number of major studies of drivers involved in crashes[4] or arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol[5] indicate that the preferred beverage of a majority of such drivers is beer. And more recent research presents compelling evidence that beer drinking and driving while intoxicated is a particular problem among young, unmarried men.[6]

The evidence cited above indicates that beer not only plays a significant role in the lives of young men but is associated with cultural assumptions, values, and practices that make the excessive consumption of beer a desirable end — or at least an end not to be shunned for the risk it poses in association with driving. And the resistance of the practice of beer-drinking and driving to change, even in the face of widescale educational programs and persuasive campaigns, suggests that beer is deeply embedded in a complex set of potent cultural myths of particular significance to young males.

A major proportion of television advertising is devoted to beer. None of it is intentionally directed to children. But as we have already noted, it is easily accessible to them and like all television advertising, a subject of intense interest. Intention aside, therefore, advertising on television functions as an important source of cultural learning for the young. And because other cultural changes have reduced opportunities for children to learn what it means to be male during their formative years, commercials are especially potent sources of sex-role learning for young boys. The purpose of this research, therefore, was to analyze televised beer commercials for the cultural myths — patterns of beliefs, associations, values, meanings — they reflect and propagate, and to indicate how such myths may be implicated in the often fatal mixture of young men, automobiles, and beer.

Data Collection and Sample

The body of this report consists of 14 composite descriptions of themes and myths represented in television beer commercials, based on analyses of 40 beer commercials broadcast during television network programs aired in February and March of 1987. The sample of commercials was obtained by videorecording approximately 18 hours of Saturday and Sunday afternoon and evening network sports programs in New York City and Iowa City, Iowa, and approximately 4 hours of prime-time weeknight programming carried on independent stations in the New York metropolitan area. Weekend sports programs were selected as the focus of videorecording because they are easily accessible to children and adolescents.

After reruns of the same commercials were eliminated, the videotapes yielded 40 different beer commercials. These were transferred to a master tape for analysis.

Table 1 lists the commercials on the master tape. They are numbered in order of their appearance, and these numbers are used to refer to specific commercials in the analyses that follow. In addition, each commercial was assigned a title based on its content.

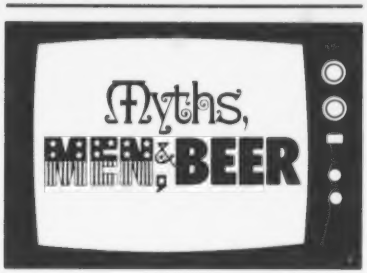
The 40 commercials analyzed represent 15 brands of beer, as follows: Becks (n=1), Budweiser (n=7), Bud Light (n=8), Busch (n=3), Colt 45 (n=2), Heileman's Old Style (n=1), King Cobra (n=1), Meister Brau (n=1), Michelob (n=2), Michelob Light (n=1), Miller (n=2), Miller Genuine Draft (n=5), Miller Lite (n=4), Old Milwaukee (n=4), and Rolling Rock (n=1).

Since the myths and themes identified in the commercials tended to correspond to different brands of beer, the following composite descriptions are organized by the brand of beer promoted.

Table 1

Beer Commercials Recorded

1. Michelob, *"I Move Better in the Night"*
2. Bud Light, *"Flash/Disco/Lamp"*
3. Bud Light, *"Toy Cannon"*
4. Bud Light, "Jackhammer"
5. Miller, *"Brewery"*
6. Old Milwaukee, *"Florida Everglades"*
7. Old Milwaukee, *"Snake River, Wyoming"*
8. Old Milwaukee, *"Lafitte, Louisiana"*
9. Miller Genuine Draft, *"Beer at its Best"*
10. Miller Genuine Draft, *"Farm Hands"*
11. Budweiser, *"The Carpenter"*
12. Heileman's, *"Pure Water"*
13. Budweiser, *"America's Cup"*
14. Michelob, *"Tonight"*
15. Miller Genuine Draft, *"Piano Movers"*
16. Miller, *"Brewed Darker"*
17. Busch, *"Cowboys"*
18. Budweiser, *"St. Patrick's Day"*
19. Michelob Light, *"Madeline Kahn"*
20. Budweiser, *"They Said This City Was Through"*
21. Bud Light, *"Plant/Bulb/Drumsticks"*
22. Budweiser, *"My Son is Running the Business Now"*
23. Miller Genuine Draft, *"Billboard"*
24. Miller Genuine Draft, *"Tap"*
25. Bud Light, *"Train Set"*
26. Bud Light, *"Godzilla"*
27. Bud Light, *"Edison"*
28. Becks, *"San Francisco"*
29. Budweiser, *"Father and Son"*
30. Busch, *"Rodeo"*
31. Budweiser, *"Racing"*
32. Meister Brau, *"Dinner Party"*
33. Colt 45, *"Billy Dee Williams"*
34. Bud Light, *"Video Game"*
35. King Cobra, *"Hammer"*
36. Rolling Rock, *"Light-Tight Six Packs"*
37. Busch, *"River Crossing"*
38. Old Milwaukee, *"Glacier Bay, Alaska"*
39. Miller Lite, *"Joe Piscopo"*
40. Colt 45, *"Body Language"*



Thematic Patterns in Television Beer Commercials

Budweiser Beer: Manhood and the American Dream

The majority of the Budweiser commercials viewed present images of men (and occasionally women) at work. (11, 13, 20, 22, 29, of Table 1, p. 12) Pride is a major theme in the Budweiser work world: pride in the individual's labor, in himself, his ethnic identity, his co-workers, family, friends, community, and country. In these commercials work is identified as a patriotic duty, and beer as one of its rewards: the jingle tells us, "You make America work and this Bud's for you." But there are more subtle themes woven through the Budweiser commercials, as a closer look at one of them reveals.

The commercial we have titled "The Carpenter" opens with a scene of a job dispatcher, an older man, reading names from a clipboard. A crowd of laborers is gathered nearby, men of various ages waiting hopefully to hear their names called for the day's jobs. As the dispatcher reads the last name on the list, a Polish name that he has some trouble pronouncing, a young man steps out of the crowd. The young man assertively corrects the dispatcher's pronunciation. In the background a foreman, perhaps in his forties, betrays a slight hint of disapproval in his otherwise impassive expression. The scene shifts to a montage of images representing the entire day's work. The young man is clearly nervous at first, dropping his tools as the foreman looks on. But he is also energetic and hardworking, and by the end of the montage he appears to be working competently, and a great deal of work has been accomplished. Finally, one of his co-workers has to tell him that it's quitting time. In the following scene, the young man is standing towards the front of a crowded tavern, looking somewhat nervous and out of place. A voice calls him over, and he moves deeper into the tavern, to the bar where the foreman is sitting. The foreman, who for the first time is displaying a trace of a smile, is holding up a beer. The young man breaks into a broad grin and takes the beer.

This commercial is centered around the theme of initiation. Any initiation serves to delineate the crossing of a boundary between different social statuses, usually from a position of lesser to one of greater social esteem. One form of initiation observed in almost every culture is the puberty rite. Before going through the rite, the individual is considered a child, and afterwards an adult. No biological change has occurred during the ritual; the change is symbolic. All initiation ceremonies confirm the individual's status as a full member of the social group to which he is being admitted.

In this commercial, both the dispatcher and the foreman hold the power to confer and confirm admission to the world of adult work, by virtue of their age and supervisory positions. As the commercial opens, the dispatcher is exercising his power by choosing the few members of the crowd who will be given the opportunity to work. The young man is clearly a novice at his work. The fact that the dispatcher mispronounces his name indicates that the young man is unfamiliar to him. As a neophyte, he is understandably nervous and clumsy. He is equally uncomfortable when he is first shown in the tavern. Standing alone on the periphery of the crowd, he is an outsider. The foreman, on the other hand, is sitting at the bar, which is the focal point of the tavern. The foreman's position is that of a regular patron, a full member of the bar's society. By inviting the young man over, he is inviting him to join the society, to "become one of the guys." The foreman's smile shows his approval and acceptance of the young man, and the gift of the beer is not just a reward for work well done, but a formal symbol of initiation. In other words, the young man's initiation into the adult work world and the world of "regular guys" is consummated by going to the tavern, being called to the bar by an authority figure, and being presented with a beer. In this sense, the scene is analogous to the confirmation or bar mitzvah ceremony in which the individual goes to a church or synagogue, is summoned to the pulpit by the clergyman, and is given some sort of gift of religious significance (e.g., a bible or prayerbook).

In this commercial the theme of initiation is closely tied together with two pervasive American myths. One is the Horatio Alger myth, the myth of the American dream. Like the protagonists of the Horatio Alger stories, the hero of the commercial is a young man of no particular advantages, but who is optimistic, hard-working and sincere. Through a combination of pluck and luck (in being chosen to work by the foreman), he succeeds. Because the

theme of initiation is stressed in this commercial, the depiction of his success is limited to his acceptance into the adult society of work and beer. Still his success is no less clear: he has achieved his goal of acceptance. The Horatio Alger myth has been particularly strong among immigrant groups, and it comes as no surprise that the young man is given a definite ethnic identity. Even though he is in a subordinate position, his pride in his ethnic identity is clearly demonstrated when he corrects the dispatcher's pronunciation of his last name. This act is somewhat risky, as the dispatcher does not look happy about being corrected. It is this same pride, however, that allows the young man to do a good job. The jingle in the background emphasizes work and pride, and the final scene of the montage, where the young man is working alone and has to be told by a co-worker that it is quitting time, emphasizes the young man's pride in his work. In the end, the young man's competence is recognized and rewarded by the foreman. The foreman is not given ethnic identity; in other words, he is an American. His acceptance of the young man, therefore, symbolizes America's acceptance of the hard-working immigrant. And the acceptance is indicated by the gift of beer. In this way the consumption of beer is presented as an American ritual, and one that is closely tied to the American dream.

A variant of the myth of the American dream might be called the myth of the promising rookie. In sports, this myth centers on the rookie player who plays so well in the preseason that he is given an opportunity to be a starting player, and from there moves rapidly to star status on the team. In the theater, the "rookie" is the understudy who gets a chance when the lead becomes sick or injured. In the motion picture industry, it is the waiter who is noticed by a producer, and given a role, In this commercial the promising rookie is the untried young outsider who is given a chance to work and proves himself worthy. In the opening scene, he is chosen from a large crowd. Although there are some hitches along the way, in the end the choice was correct. The promising rookie lives up to his potential. One of the morals behind the myth of the promising rookie is that opportunity knocks but once. The young man understands this principle, and so takes the opportunity that is offered and makes the most of it. This is significant because at the end of the commercial the young man is once again lost in a crowd of people, and once again he is called by the foreman. And once again he takes the opportunity. Thus the idea that an individual should not turn down an offer of beer and its opportunity for social

advancement, especially if the offer is made by an older man and an "insider."

Finally, the commercial also presents certain elements of the myth of masculinity. The foreman is a mature male who holds a position of power and authority in the context of the commercial, and therefore serves as a model of masculinity. He initiates the young man into the world of physical labor and beer drinking. Both physical labor and beer drinking have traditionally been associated with the American myth of masculinity. Another component of this myth is that real men do not display emotions, and here the commercial makes clear who is the initiate and who the full-fledged man. The young man reveals his feelings all too quickly and easily, both verbally and non-verbally. His pride, his nervousness, his intense interest in his work are given clear expression in the tone of his voice, the look on his face, his clumsy handling of his tools, and his failure to notice "quittin' time" until a seasoned co-worker stops him. The foreman, on the other hand, maintains an expression of almost complete impassivity. He gives only the slightest indications of his annoyance at the beginning of the commercial and his acceptance at the end. In fact, his most expressive act is giving the young man a beer. The giving and sharing of beer is shown as a substitute, therefore, for a genuine expression of emotion, or, alternately, as one of the few acceptable ways in which a real man may show his feelings.

The same connections among masculinity, work, and beer are presented in a somewhat different light in another Budweiser commercial. (29) This advertisement centers on the relationship between father and son. The father is a man in his sixties, the son grown and married. The commercial opens with the father working on the front porch of a house as his son tells him that he will be right back. The son goes inside the house. From the sparse furnishings and boxes it is clear that he and his wife have just moved in. His wife shows him the baseball glove she just unpacked, and he tells her that he just found out that " . . . Pop worked overtime to pay for it. He was always knocking himself out to give us something better." His wife tells him that his father "sounds a lot like you." As the father continues to saw and hammer, the son returns with two cans of Budweiser beer hanging from a plastic six pack holder (thus giving the impression that they are his last two beers). The narrator says, "Budweiser, the king of beers, salutes everyone who's ever worked

for more than just a paycheck." The father then thanks the son for the beer, and the son responds, "I think that's my line."

As in the previous commercial, work is once again presented as the key to success and the attainment of the American dream. The father is the embodiment of the Puritan work ethic, working hard both on and off the job, sacrificing in order to provide a better life for his son. His success is reflected in his son: the father could not easily afford to buy the baseball glove (the ultimate piece of Americana) for his son, but the son has fulfilled the middle class version of the American dream by becoming a homeowner. The wife's comment on the similarity between father and son is another indication of the father's success: he has successfully transferred his values to his offspring. The strength of those values is implicit in the fact that the father continues to labor for his son's benefit, even though the son is an adult, married, and a homeowner. Beer is again a reward for hard work, one of the small pleasures that can be enjoyed without violating the father's values.

While the father and son hammer and saw on the porch outside, the wife is sitting indoors. She is excluded from the masculine domain of labor; her territory is the emotional. She acts as the catalyst, never coming into contact with the father nor coming between the father and son. Instead, she facilitates the son's expression of appreciation, without directly interfering. This allows the son to express emotion without violating the myth of masculinity, that is, without the presence of a female and without any overt display of affection. He demonstrates his gratitude by giving his father a beer and by using humor ("I think that's my line"). As in the previous commercial, beer is portrayed as the only acceptable way for a man's man to express affection for another man. The theme of initiation is also present here. Although the son is ostensibly an adult, he is also somewhat childlike. He still relies on his father's help, still hangs onto his baseball glove, and only just found out about how much his father sacrificed for him. Within the mini-drama of the commercial, the gift of beer functions as a symbolic turning point. By offering the beer, the son is beginning to pay back all that his father has done for him, and can now relate to him man-to-man instead of father-to-child. In the first commercial, the older man's offer to the younger is an expression of acceptance. In this, the younger man's offer of beer to the older is an assertion of equality.

Bud Light: Upscale Initiation

In contrast to the commercials for Budweiser beer, which tend to feature blue collar types glorifying labor and the American way, the advertisements for Bud Light are populated by young white collar workers or professionals — in other words, by "yuppies." Patriotism is absent, as is the work environment. The majority of Bud Light ads take place in a bar (2, 3, 4, 21, 25, 34), a leisure environment for all but the waitresses and bartenders. The bar is still a man's world, as men order the beer and tend bar while women either remain in the background or appear in the lower-status role of waitress. The barroom is always upscale and idealized. Everyone present is young and good-looking. The bar is neither dark nor filled with smoke, and it is invariably clean. In short, the Bud Light bar is about as realistic as the gas station attendants with immaculate uniforms and perfect manicures who also populate the fantasy world of the television commercial.

The Bud Light ads promote drinking at bars as much as they promote the particular brand of beer. Bars are portrayed as interesting and exciting places, places where anything can happen. They are a constant source of stimulation, a leisure environment that provides unique experiences as well as opportunities to meet others (there are always plenty of patrons, including attractive women, and the waitresses are always friendly). Absent from this idealized bar is any indication of how the patrons arrived, or what method of transportation they will use to return home after they have finished drinking.

The Bud Light commercials follow a simple formula. A patron asks the bartender for a light, is given something other than a beer (i.e., a light bulb, camera flash, neon drumsticks), and then corrects himself by saying, "A Bud Light." At times the patron takes it in stride, as when one fellow asks a waitress for a Bud Light while playing a video game, and spaceships come out of the machine and fly around inside the bar. Using his finger, he shoots them all, gaining the approval of the waitress and other patrons. (34) Here a comparison can be made to the series of James Bond movies in which the hero drinks, seduces women, and still finds time to save the world without ever losing his cool. Even the formula for ordering, " . . . Light, Bud Light," is reminiscent of the movie character's formulaic way of identifying himself: "Bond, James

Bond." Unlike most of the heavier beers, Bud Light is portrayed as classy, fitting neatly *into* affluent and romantic settings. The video game player's impressive display of coordination implies that drinking Bud Light will not result in any impairment of abilities, leaving the individual free to deal with the unexpected.

More often, however, the substitute 'light' comes as a shock to the patron, although he is usually able to recover. The incorrect and often bizarre replacements for light beer are clearly not merely mistakes on the part of the bartender, but are more in the nature of practical jokes with a sardonic point. The bartenders are tired of dealing with incomplete and uninformed orders from their customers, and want them to "get with it." Their pranks can also be seen as a type of initiation, a kind of fraternity hazing. The fully initiated drinker knows his beers and orders by brand. Only a novice goes into a bar and asks for "a beer." Thus the bartenders perform an important socializing function, training their patrons in proper barroom etiquette. And in all situations, a man's man must never appear indecisive. Knowing exactly what he wants is an important characteristic of adulthood and masculinity. Knowing enough to order the right thing is necessary in order to avoid embarrassment and ridicule, an ever-present danger to the upwardly mobile.

Indeed, the threat of ridicule seems to be the central theme of the Bud Light commercials. And that threat is closely tied to the fear of being exposed as an "outsider" in a setting where it is very desirable, and one very much wants, to be "in." There is nothing very subtle about the Bud Light commercials and the theme they broadcast to those most concerned with peer group acceptance — the adolescent and pre-adolescent young: a real "insider" knows what he's doing in bars. Don't be a novice when it comes to beer.

Bud Light: The Gizzard of Menlo Park

Of the eight advertisements for Bud Light viewed, one did not follow the typical formula. (27) In this commercial a young man named Thomas (presumably Edison) is speaking to an older man. After a detailed explanation of his new invention, Thomas throws a switch and an electric light is produced. The older man, not entirely impressed, says, "Well, it's very nice, Thomas, but I wanted a Bud Light." He removes the glass bulb, turns it upside down so that it can function as a glass, fills it with beer, and says, "Don't feel bad, Thomas. It's not a complete loss."

This commercial makes light of Edison's breakthrough, representing it as less important than beer. While this is done for humorous effect, the message here should be considered seriously. Edison is chastised for being too serious, for being all work and no play. Invention, once a source of awe and pride, is shown to be unremarkable — an attitude that is representative of contemporary America, not Edison's time. Today we have come to see science and technology as commonplace; we take innovation for granted. Successful new inventions are expected, and we are surprised only when they fail, as in the case of the Challenger or Three Mile Island. As the process of invention is greeted with a 'ho-hum' attitude, the consumption of leisure products becomes our most valued activity, and beer, of course, is a major leisure product. Invention belongs in the work environment, and so is dismissed.

It is not coincidental that this commercial comes at a time when American industrial productivity and innovativeness have begun to decline. Beer, as a product of agriculture, a component of the service industry (bars), and a form of entertainment, fits perfectly within the new economic context of American society. Industry, like the electric light, is still necessary, but it is a thing of the past.

Miller Beer: A Product of American Labor

Ed Marinaro, former NFL and Ivy League football player, takes us on a guided tour of a brewery in one of the commercials for Miller Beer. (5) This advertisement resembles a television news report, with Marinaro speaking directly to the audience or interviewing the brewery workers. The brewery is large and impressive, with a great deal of natural sunlight illuminating the inside. The workers are friendly, serious, and knowledgeable. Marinaro ends his report by saying, "I learned a lot from these people. And if making a beer that's dark and rich is the American way, I'd say Miller's doing a pretty good job of it."

This commercial complements much of the advertising for other brands of beer. Testimonials of sports celebrities, patriotic themes, and images of working men are all common elements, but they are typically used to present an image of the type of person who drinks beer. Here the same elements are used to represent the type of people who produced the beer. The workers are intelligent; even an educated man like Marinaro can "learn a lot from these people." The idealized portrayal of American workers extends to their

uniforms, which are spotless, to the factory, which is clean and pleasant, and to their bosses, who are completely absent. All that we are left with is the myth of the American worker, who is friendly, motivated, competent, and self-directing, and the myth of American know-how, the idea that American technology is, by definition, superior to that of the rest of the world. Through the slogan, "Miller's: made the American Way," and by fostering a state of identification between the brewery workers and the audience, the commercial suggests that the consumption of beer is a patriotic act, if not a duty.

Miller Genuine Draft: A Medium for Male-Bonding

Miller Genuine Draft is a relatively new entry in the beer market, and consequently a number of advertisements concentrate on name and product identification. (9, 23, 24) However, two of the commercials for Miller Genuine Draft (10, 15) depict groups of relatively young men (20-30 year olds) drinking beer and reminiscing. In one (10), the men are playing pool in a bar and talking about the time they were loading bales of hay for "Old Man Donovan." As revealed through talk and flashbacks, a mistake resulted in the bales falling to the ground, forcing the men to load them a second time. After their job was finally completed, Old Man Donovan brought out a keg of beer as a reward. Back at the bar, one of the men, holding a bottle of beer, says longingly, "I remember that beer." A voiceover continues, "Drinking Miller Genuine Draft will remind you of the best beer you ever had . . . ," and explains how the brewing process is identical to that of draft beer. The commercial ends with one of the men asking in a joking manner, "Hey how come Donovan never asked us back?"

The second commercial (15) follows a similar format. This time, men have just finished playing basketball, and are sitting holding beers and talking about the time one of them moved into a new apartment and the rest helped out. Flashbacks show the men using a rope pulley to lift a piano up to a third story window. Just as it reaches the window, the rope breaks and the piano crashes to the pavement. As the story is being told, the young man who was moving takes a great deal of ribbing from his friends. For example, after one friend says, "At least he did get us a keg," another responds, "Yeah, well buying a keg was the only good idea you had that day." The narrator takes over at this point, as in the first

advertisement, and the commercial ends with the man who was moving retorting, "I should have hired skilled labor." Off camera, one of his friends whips a basketball at him in response, which he just barely catches in time. The supportiveness and camaraderie of all-male groups is a major theme in both commercials. In the first no women are present, and in the second, there is only a brief glimpse of a young woman, presumably the mover's girlfriend, in one scene. The men in these commercials are not laborers per se, but they are engaged in physical labor in the flashbacks. Thus masculinity is associated with labor, and drinking beer is presented as a reward for hard work, and as a recreational activity (in the present). Mistakes and carelessness are laughed off in these commercials. Although the collapse of a large stack of bales of hay and the crash of the piano appear dangerous in the flashback scenes, they are treated lightly by the men, and the danger is never acknowledged. The message presented to the audience is that men like to play rough, take chances, and ignore (or find amusing) the costly and dangerous consequences of this behavior. The portrayal of the man's man as engaged in physical activity, drinking beer, and reckless behavior is a particularly troublesome combination.

In these commercials, the beer consumed by the group of friends serves as the link between the present and the past. The statement, "I remember that beer," identifies beer as a mnemonic device. In other words, their memory of past experiences together revolves around drinking beer. The question that these commercials answer is, How do men relate to other men? The answer is that they meet in groups, not dyads, and they tell stories, joke, brag to one another, and insult each other good-naturedly. And regardless of the actual setting, beer provides the true bond for masculine camaraderie. Although relatively well-behaved and clearly sober in the context of these commercials, the young men of Miller Genuine Draft ads represent, in their fond recollections of near disasters and their disregard for consequences, an ideal of masculinity not far removed from its more extreme portrayals in such celebrations of drunk and disorderly "fun" as movies like **Animal House**.

Lite Beer from Miller: The Aging Child; The Adorable Jerk

The advertisements for Lite Beer from Miller generally feature retired sports heroes, comedians, and other celebrities. Whether in a bar or out in the woods, the Lite Beer world is male-dominated, with

an occasional appearance by a stereotypical dumb blonde. The men that appear in these commercials are rarely young, although their behavior is often humorously childish. For example, many of these ads feature a shouting match between two men or groups of men over whether Lite beer "tastes great" or is "less filling." While the commercial included in this sample (39) makes only a brief reference to this ongoing conflict, patterned on children's verbal duels ("It is." "It isn't"), it does feature the childlike adult. Joe Piscopo, identified in subtitles as "'Jumpin' Joe' Piscopo, Ex-School Yard Great," is seen in a bar, dressed in a sweatsuit and carrying a basketball. All the other patrons of the bar apparently are professional basketball players, and all that is visible of them are their arms and torsos. Speaking in an urban, tough guy voice, Piscopo tells us, "When I played hoops I could beat anybody. Still can." he then challenges the basketball players to a game of "one-on-one." Ignored, he calls them "chicken," "wimp," and "beanpole," and says, "At least I can enjoy a Miller Lite while I'm looking for a game. . . ." Finally, one of the basketball players takes the ball from him, twirls it on his finger, and then transfers it onto Piscopo's head, causing Piscopo to start spinning.

Piscopo's character is a familiar one, the obnoxious kid who tries to gain acceptance from his peers, or older boys, by acting tough. Good-natured ribbing is acceptable behavior among a group of males, but Piscopo is obviously an outsider to the group, and his taunting is inappropriate. Because he does not know his place, his chastisement is justified. What is presented here is the other side of the myth of initiation, that is, initiation denied. Piscopo seeks immediate entry into the group; in a sense he tries to bypass the initiation. He is rebuffed because initiation must always involve some form of challenge and trial; group membership must be earned. His failure serves as a lesson on how males relate to other males, or rather how males ought not to relate to other males. His mistake is not that he is too feminine, but that he tries too hard to behave in a masculine manner.

In addition to the way he dresses, talks, and acts, Piscopo's childlike role is highlighted by his smallness in contrast to the basketball players. Despite the disclaimer that he is an "ex-school yard" player his portrayal of a kid is excellent. The fact that this 'kid' drinks beer, however, is disturbing. As previously noted, many of the Lite Beer ads present male adults acting in a childish manner. While this is intended as a source of humor, there is also a message

that when men get together in a leisure setting, they are allowed to act like children. One of the ways that men may relate to other men is by reenacting their boyhood and adolescence. Since beer is presented as a medium for male-bonding, it can also be seen as a facilitator of such juvenile behavior. The saying "Boys will be boys" is applied here to males of all ages. The problem is that these commercials not only imply that men can drink beer and act like boys; they also imply that boys can drink beer and act like men.

Both the Miller Lite and the Miller Genuine Draft commercials make use of another theme that seems to have particular appeal to contemporary adolescents and pre-adolescents — a theme we call the myth of the adorable jerk. In older Western literature and tradition, the buffoon, the jester, and the clown play important roles. The King's fool, for example, serves to remind the king of his own human fallibility, stupidity, and above all, mortality, and so preserve him (in theory, at least) from the sin of hubris. For that reason, the fool of Western tradition is associated not only with comedy, but with sadness and wisdom. Some of the implications of superior insight into the human condition attached to the figure of the fool carry over into his contemporary portrayal as the loser, the nerd, the jerk beloved of American adolescents in such films as **The Jerk** and **Revenge of the Nerds**, but in a much-degraded form. Here, the nerd is an anti-hero — an outsider, a wimp, an incompetent, a loser — who achieves status by either wreaking disaster on the smooth-running world of more successful adults (or adolescents) or by being adopted by them as a kind of adorable pet. The appeal of the nerd to adolescents and pre-adolescents lies in their own self-doubts about their strength, their attractiveness, their ability to win acceptance into the tough world of "real" men, and the reassurance provided in the myth of the adorable jerk that even the worst screw-up can find a warm niche in the world of "big men" by hanging around with them and outdoing them, in a "comic" way, at their own game. The nerd wins his place among men by demonstrating that he is no real threat, but an object of fun and amusement, and therefore affection, to others more competent than he. Piscopo is just such a figure in the Miller Lite commercials, which represents bars, drinking, and beer as essential media through which even the nerd can find his niche among the big men. The more frightening side of such figures, in their extension in films like **Animal House**, for example, is that one of the ways they maintain their special place is by drinking themselves frankly out of control, and reducing everything around them to shambles.

Michelob Beer: The Music Video

The commercials for Michelob beer imitate the form of music videos, with a rock sound track, dreamlike imagery, fast-paced cutting, and even some concert footage. (1, 14) The commercials feature images of urban exteriors at night and indoor scenes of bars and clubs. In the first commercial viewed (1) the images are set to contemporary rock music with the following lyrics (parentheses indicate voice of a male narrator):

"I move better in the night.
I won't stop until the daylight.
Umm, makes me feel right.
I move better in the night.

I'm overheating, I'm ready to burn.
Got dirt on my wheels, they're ready to turn.

I move better in the night.
(So exceptionally smooth)
I won't stop until the daylight.
Umm, makes me feel right.
I move better in the night.
(The night belongs to Michelob)."

The lyrics and discontinuous images are intentionally ambiguous, giving the viewers wide latitude in the meaning they may choose to make of them. Although a number of interpretations are possible, one in particular is troublesome. While the reference to "wheels" may be viewed as a metaphor, many of the images in the commercial are of automobiles driving through the city at night, some of which are shown in fast motion. In this context, the references to being "ready to burn" and "wheels" that are "ready to turn" are easily interpreted as a positive message about driving fast. The line, "I move better in the night," repeated four times, implies that driving is actually easier at night. The images of night driving are trouble-free; there are no accidents, no reckless driving. The worst thing that happens is that a couple walking down a sidewalk are splashed by a taxi driving through a puddle. The nighttime traffic moves along smoothly, and the association with Michelob beer, "So exceptionally smooth," is not direct but clearly present.

Drinking and driving at night, a dangerous combination, is shown here as preferable to daytime driving.

This commercial is a paean to urban nightlife. The only individuals shown to the viewer are young, good-looking, and presumably single. Several scenes are of bars and nightclubs, where young males and females are meeting each other, dancing, and playing pool. A number of scenes show a young couple walking and running through the streets of the city as cars go by, and one scene shows them walking down a subway platform. The city is idealized: there is no garbage or litter on the streets, no panhandlers or shopping bag ladies, no muggers, and no noise (unless one counts the rock soundtrack). As noted above, the worst thing that happens to the young couple is that they get splashed by a passing taxi, but even here the camera cuts away just as the water begins to hit them. so we do not see the aftereffects of soaked and soiled clothing.

The Michelob music-video depicts the city at night as a romantic playground for young, affluent singles. It promotes the fantasized lifestyle of young people who live in or near a major urban area. The daytime, presumably, is for work or school; nighttime means freedom from these restrictions, which is why the young person can "move better." Nighttime also means that it is time to have fun by dancing, drinking, listening to music, and meeting the opposite sex. The city provides entertainment for the entire night, so the young person won't have to "stop until the daylight." Beer is presented as part of this lifestyle for males and females alike. Drinking beer is part of the romance of the urban experience, and Michelob's smoothness parallels the smoothness and freedom of nightlife. Daytime belongs to the world of adults, but the night belongs to young people and, as the slogan tells us, to Michelob, which "owns" the night — and presumably, therefore, the young people out in it.

The second Michelob commercial (14) is somewhat shorter, featuring scenes of Genesis, a rock group popular among young people (including teenagers and pre-teens), performing their hit song "Tonight." Also in the style of music videos, concert footage mingles with urban scenes, including a shot of a young male and female in each other's arms, leaning against a parked car as other cars drive down the street. Several shots focus on a young woman leaning over a juke box and selecting the song "Tonight." Her expression is one of pure pleasure, and she seems lost in thought.

Other scenes, presumably her memories, show her dancing in the arms of a handsome young man. His arms are around her neck, and in one hand (behind her back) is a bottle of beer. Here, along with the celebration of urban nightlife, is a clearer image of the role of beer in this lifestyle: beer facilitates social interaction between the sexes. Alcohol's ability to lower inhibitions has long made it popular in such situations, particularly for young people who are insecure about themselves and the way others see them. Michelob is the means by which an often unpleasant and unfriendly city can be transformed into a romantic environment populated only by attractive people. Drinking beer can make the individual feel better about himself, and about his surroundings. The particular idealized "night" that belongs to Michelob can only be attained by drinking Michelob beer.

Michelob Light: Extravagant Expectations

The Michelob Light slogan, "Who says you can't have it all?" reflects a contemporary version of the myth of the American Dream. In this case, the emphasis is not on the possibility of success, but on the idea that there is no need for struggle and sacrifice in getting ahead, no need for hard work or compromises. The traditional Horatio Alger myth holds little meaning for many of the children of the affluent, who were born into middle class households, sent to college, and graduated into well-paying white collar or professional occupations. The Michelob Light slogan and advertising campaign reflect the affluent lifestyle of the yuppy, and they appeal with little disguise to one of the most pervasive and primitive of human motives: greed.

In one of the Michelob Light's recent commercials (19), actress Madeline Kahn gives a testimonial on behalf of the product. She is introduced by a male voiceover: "Madeline Kahn on having it all." Lying on her side on a couch, wearing what appears to be an expensive gown and necklace, and holding a bottle of Michelob Light, Kahn goes into the following monologue:

> *"What is this fascination we have with having it all? Haven't you ever wanted it all, just a tiny bit? Michelob Light has it all, superb taste in less filling beer. But is having it all the answer? Is it really so wonderful to be wealthy, glamorous, and have an unbelievable singing voice?"*

Kahn answers her last question by singing "yes" in operatic fashion, and then chuckles. The scene shifts to a shot of the beer, and the male voiceover says, "Michelob Light. You **can** have it all."

This is the only commercial viewed in which a man does not appear. It goes against the grain of all other beer commercials not only because it is relatively rare to find an image of a women holding a beer, but because even when women have beers in these advertisements, there are always men present. Although there is no real reference to the feminist movement here, Kahn's beer and identification as someone who is wealthy, successful, and has it all, seem to be a bow toward the idea that all women do **not** fit the traditional stereotype in most beer commercials. On the other hand, Kahn's monologue is still framed by a man's voice, and her position (lying on her side) is both a passive and seductive one. From a male point of view, the commercial implies that having it all includes having a woman like her.

The commercial offers us a taste of the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Even if we are not wealthy and glamorous, we can have a tiny bit of it all by consuming Michelob Light.

One of the myths contained in this commercial is the idea that the products we consume are the only true indicators of our social class. In the egalitarian American society, factors such as heredity, education, and talent are rejected as a basis for class distinctions; wealth is of primary importance, and the only way to demonstrate wealth is by conspicuous consumption. The reason that Kahn's "unbelievable singing voice" functions as a punch line is that it does not match up with the other elements of having it all. Her voice is something intrinsic to herself, a genuine talent. It is not related to materialism, as is wealth and glamor. But in the end, the point of the commercial is that talent is not to be taken seriously. Like one's looks, one's body, one's labor, it is merely another tool for "getting it all."

Meister Brau Beer: Simple is Beautiful

Meister Brau's recent advertising campaign features television star George Wendt, who is best known as Norm Peterson, a beer-guzzling barroom regular in the situation comedy "Cheers." As a regular, Wendt also comes across as a regular guy, and it is this image that monopolizes his commercial appearances, even though

he is referred to as Mr. Wendt. In one such commercial (32), we find Wendt at a high-class dinner party. Even though he wears a tuxedo, his overweight frame, homely features, and common speech provide a sharp contrast to the appearance and behavior of his angular, aristocratic, and somewhat elderly hosts and fellow guests. As the commercial begins, everyone is seated at the dinner table, and classical violin music is playing in the background. The hostess tells Wendt how glad they are that he could make it. Wendt replies that he "wouldn't miss it for the world," then turns to the audience and says, "I hope this doesn't go too late. There's a meter running on the tux." When the host offers him wine, Wendt replies, "No thanks, I thought it was bring your own." As the host looks in shock, he pulls a can of beer from a cooler that is sitting by his side and says to the audience, "Well, what can I say? I'm a simple guy. I like double overtime, smoky poker games, and Meister Brau. Nothing's richer, nothing's smoother. And guys like me don't need anything else." At this point a white-gloved waiter sets a dish down in front of Wendt. On it is a roast fowl about the size of a hummingbird. "It's nouvelle cuisine, Mr. Wendt," the host explains. Wendt turns to the audience a final time and says, "Please be an appetizer, please."

Wendt's place in the upper crust milieu is that of honored guest. The hosts seem intent on pleasing and impressing him, presumably due to his fame as a television actor. Even though he is constantly violating social rules, his behavior is tolerated. Thus, the commercial indicates that the celebrity enjoys greater status than the blueblood; media stars are the true nobility of American society. Wendt's place in the hierarchy is reinforced by his own lack of tolerance and his need to have things his own way. Instead of exhibiting shame or insecurity in the elite environment he finds himself in, he demonstrates barely concealed contempt toward his hosts. While he truly is a fish out of water at the dinner party, he brings his own environment with him in the form of Meister Brau Beer. Beer is a portable commodity, and the message here is that it is acceptable to bring beer with you wherever you go; like a Boy Scout, the true beer drinker is always prepared. Moreover, the commercial indicates that consuming beer is appropriate in any setting, regardless of what other people may think. Beer is also portrayed as the drink of choice of the common man. It is associated with other masculine activities, such as wage labor and sports ("double overtime"), and smoking and gambling ("smoky poker

games"). The elderly and effeminate may prefer wine, but a man's man must have his beer, and he is never embarrassed by it, no matter what the circumstances.

In the ad, the disapproval of the hosts is dismissed as Wendt breaks the frame and addresses the audience directly. Thus the viewer is placed on the same side as Wendt, and the opposite side of the hosts. Whereas the elite maintain their position in the social hierarchy by being different from the common people, the celebrity's status depends on public approval. Much like the populist politician, the celebrity comes across as one of the common people. He celebrates the myth of the common man. His simple wisdom and common sense tell him that a two-inch bird does not a meal make, despite the fancy label, "nouvelle cuisine," Being unsophisticated is a virtue, because it means being unpretentious. The real man knows what he likes, and what he likes is good enough for him.

As a representative of the plain folks, Wendt reflects the anti-elitism and anti-intellectualism of American society. Valuing democracy and equality, Americans find it necessary to derogate the concept of an elite. Thus, in American popular culture, aristocrats are typically portrayed in a negative light, as boring, stupid, and trivial. The message is that we common slobs are better off than they are despite their wealth and power. And if we should happen to drink a little too much beer now and then and mess up their nice clean homes and streets, and maybe just put a few dents in their fancy cars — well, that's just too bad.

Colt 45 Malt Liquor: Alcoholic Afro-disiac

The Colt 45 commercials feature movie star Billy Dee Williams in a series of brief monologues. (33, 40) In the first ad (33), titles and male voiceover provide the introduction: "Billy Dee Williams talks about Colt 45." Then follow three segments with Williams. In the first, he appears holding a can of Colt 45 and says, "There are two rules to remember if you want to have a good time: Rule number one, never run out of Colt 45. Rule number two, never forget rule number one." In the next segment Williams says, "You want to know why you should keep plenty of Colt 45 on hand? You never know when friends might show up." As he says this he opens the can and a young woman's hand reaches out and takes it from him. In the third segment he concludes, "I don't claim you can have a better time with Colt 45 than without it, but why take chances?"

During this segment, the camera pulls back to reveal that Williams is standing and that sitting next to him is an attractive woman. The scene then shifts to a picture of a Colt 45 can, surrounded by the slogan (which is read aloud): "The power of Colt 45: It works every time."

The use of Williams in this commercial is significant because his image is not just that of a man's man, but of a ladies' man. He is considered handsome and sexy, and comes across as an expert on seduction. In what appears to be a candid interview, he reveals his secret: he never runs out of Colt 45. Ordinarily, there are no guarantees of successful engagement with the opposite sex, even for Williams, but the "power of Colt 45" "works every time." Because malt liquor has a higher alcohol content than beer or ale, it certainly is a relatively powerful beverage. However, the slogan is also referring to alcohol's role in reducing inhibitions and its use in social situations. Alcohol is commonly conceived as an aphrodisiac, an agent that arouses or increases sexual desire. While alcohol actually reduces male sexual potency, it does have the ability to make the individual feel more confident about himself and more interested in the opposite sex. In this commercial, however, Williams keeps the Colt 45 on hand not just for himself but for "friends" — meaning, here, women. Giving the woman alcohol is part of his method of seduction, and the woman is eager to comply. In this respect, the commercial mirrors the popular notion among men that getting a woman drunk increases her desire for and willingness to engage in sex.

The second commercial (40) makes this connection clearer. It begins the same way as the first, except that this time the title is: "Billy Dee Williams on body language." Williams is shown talking and moving through an outdoor party. He says, "You know, body language tells you a lot about what a person is thinking. For instance, that means she has an interest in the finer things in life . . ." As he says this, the camera pans to show an attractive young woman sitting at a bar, holding her necklace. She shifts her position and strokes her hair, and Williams says, ". . . that means she also wants a little fun in her life, but only with the right man." At this point the woman fills her glass with Colt 45, as Williams says, "And now she's pouring a Colt 45 and we all know what that means." He goes over to her and asks if she would mind if he joined her. She replies, "You must have read my mind." Williams responds by

saying, "Something like that," and the commercial ends with the same slogan as the first.

A popular misconception about nonverbal communication is that 'body language' can be translated in the same way that a true spoken language can be, giving the individual an ability tantamount to mind reading. On the prowl, Williams uses that ability to find a young woman who is suitable for seduction. In the end, his special knowledge is unnecessary because she pours herself a Colt 45, and everyone "knows what that means." What is implied is that any woman who would sit by herself and drink must be looking to get picked up. She is sending out signals and preparing herself to be seduced.

Although the women in these commercials do take the initiative in drinking malt liquor, for the most part they reflect one of the traditional myths of femininity. The women are seated while Williams stands, and are passive for the most part. Although the woman in the body language commercial is trying to make herself approachable, she must wait for Williams to make the first move. She seems to be interested only in men, Williams in particular. She also appears to be vain, fondling her jewelry and her hair. This portrayal of the "woman's woman" forms the perfect counterpart to Williams's image as a ladies' man.

All this is secondary, however, to what these Colt 45 commercials are most blatantly about: the myth of black sexual superiority interwoven with male fears of sexual inadequacy and fantasies of super-stud successes. The "Freudian" symbolism and innuendos in the Colt 45 ads would be of more interest to note here if they were less laughably stereotypical and transparent — at least, to adults. But perhaps the very familiarity of the association between a pistol and a penis is what the advertiser hopes will give these commercials power and appeal, especially among the sexually insecure young, who may worry more than others that their own "pistols" won't "work every time." For them, and for others haunted by similar fears, identification with the big, powerful Colt 45 that never fails may provide (along with the alcohol itself) the reassurance and self-confidence they need.

Scarcely less obvious, but definitely less laughable in these ads, is the promotion of the myth that every women secretly longs to be raped — at least, the myth that, no matter what a woman may **think**

she wants ("the finer things in life") what she really wants is "a little bit of fun in her life, but only with the right man" — i.e., a man with a big pistol that "works every time." "Real men" know this about women, of course, because they can read women's bodies. And "real men" know that when it comes to "thinking," women do it with their bodies, not their "minds."

Whether one "reads" in the Colt 45 commercials the milder or nastier version of their message, one point is inescapable: that the "power" of Colt 45 is the power of transformation, turning ordinary men into superstuds and "nice girls" into willing sexual partners. Alcohol is presented here as the agency of such transformations, reinforcing the idea that drinking is indispensable to social and sexual success. "It works every time," and as Williams says, "Why take chances?"

Rolling Rock and Heileman's Old Style: Beer as Health Food

A number of beer commercials stress the purity and naturalness of their products, including Rolling Rock (36), Heileman's Old Style (12), Busch (17, 30, 37), and in a somewhat different manner, Miller and Miller Genuine Draft. (5, 9, 10, 15, 16, 23, 24) The advertisement for Rolling Rock features images of sunlight hitting the open six packs of their competitors and their own closed packaging, and of their beer being poured into a glass, along with the following voiceover:

> *"While every brewer knows that nothing protects the flavor of pure, natural beer like darkness, very few do anything about it. This is one of the few. We protect Rolling Rock in light-tight six packs because we brew Rolling Rock with all natural ingredients, mountain spring water, no additives, no preservatives. Rolling Rock Premium Beer, so pure and natural, before you open the bottle, you'll have to open the box."*

Similarly, Heileman's Old Style presents us with images of drops hitting a larger mass of water, the Heileman's label, and a mug of beer, along with the following voiceover:

> *"There was a time when the air was pure, and each drop of water that fell from the sky was as clean and fresh as water could ever be. This is the water, stored for*

centuries below the surface of the earth, that is used to make Heileman's Old Style. Water from when the earth was pure, to help make Heileman's Old Style America's best brewed premium beer."

What is reflected in these commercials is the growing fear of chemical pollutants and contaminants that has characterized the seventies and eighties. References to purity and naturalness imply that the product is free of contamination (even though some types of contamination, i.e., bacteria, are certainly natural, and require artificial processes for their elimination). The phrase "all natural ingredients" has come to be a requirement in food and beverage advertising, in response to public concern over the side effects of artificial flavorings, colorings, and preservatives. The Rolling Rock and Heileman's Old Style ads stress the purity of the water they use, reflecting an additional concern about the presence of pollutants in drinking water. With tap water suspect, bottled water manufacturers have done well for themselves, and these beer commercials invoke the positive image of special waters with their own "water from when the earth was pure," or "mountain spring water."

By identifying beer with nature, these commercials imply that drinking is not only "natural" but good for you. Some even suggest that their products confer spiritual health as well. Heileman's Old Style, for example, conjures an image of beer as a spiritual elixir, offering us a taste of Eden before the fall, the purity of the primordial. Even if such a product does not have the power to heal, it is at least an indispensable part of a "health" program.

Budweiser: Happy Motoring

In addition to its standard advertising, Budweiser also airs a number of promotional spots in which the company brings to public attention the numerous spectator sports that it sponsors. (13, 31) One of these commercials (31) focuses on racing cars and speedboats. The cars are shown speeding down race tracks, taking tight turns, and passing one another; the boats race on straightaways or make water-throwing turns. The excitement of these visuals is enhanced by fast-paced cutting and a rock rendition of the Budweiser jingle. The music is mostly instrumental, with a male voiceover at the beginning saying, "Bud thunder, it's revved up and coming at you," and at the end, a chorus of "Bud! Bud! Bud! Bud!"

followed by a male voice singing, "Bud thunder's coming through! This Bud's for you." The names Bud and Budweiser, as well as the slogan, "King of Beers," appear frequently throughout the commercial, both on the cars and boats and alone on the screen. The beer itself is never shown, however.

Regardless of the intentions of Budweiser or its advertisers, this commercial is problematic. Although the beer itself does not appear, there is no ambiguity about what the name Budweiser stands for. Any association between beer and racing is troubling, given the widespread problem of drinking and driving. Even though many people may see racing as a spectator sport, to young males, driving at high speeds racing against one another is a common means of demonstrating their skill and daring. For young men, both racing and drinking are seen as masculine behaviors. Both involve challenge to be overcome: maintaining control of the automobile on the one hand, holding one's liquor on the other. Both provide a sense of freedom, exhilaration, and power over one's environment. And both activities cannot be legally engaged in until the individual reaches a certain age. Thus they are two of the most important markers in American culture. The legal drinking age and the legal driving age are major boundaries between childhood and adulthood; they separate the men from the boys. Separately, reaching the legal age for driving and for drinking constitute rites of passage for young American males. Therefore driving and drinking, separately and together, form an essential part of the myth of masculinity. The pre-existing association between the two in the mind of the viewer can only be reinforced by this commercial. Moreover, its rock soundtrack increases the attractiveness of this association to young males.

Although certainly the most blatant, the Budweiser ad is not alone in presenting images of automobiles and motorboats in beer commercials. Michelob advertising (1) includes a number of shots of urban night driving, some in fast motion. Old Milwaukee (6) shows scenes of high speed airboating in the Florida Everglades. Other commercials disdain the combustion engine, but maintain the focus on speed, daring, and risk. Busch beer (17), for example, features several cowboys on horseback, galloping across a plain. And Budweiser's spot celebrating the victory of the Stars and Stripes in the America's Cup shows the sailing ship cutting through the waves at top speed. Traveling at fast speeds by any method is part of the myth of masculinity. Riding, sailing, and motoring all

have their dangers, all pose challenges by which a man may prove his masculinity, all provide a means by which a man can demonstrate his domination over nature. The association of these activities with beer resonates with the myth of masculinity in the mind of the male viewer.

Busch Beer: Beer for the Frontier

Although the western genre and the Marlboro man have been exiled from commercial television, the myth of the frontier lives on in beer commercials. The advertisements for Busch (17, 30, 37) feature images of cowboys riding horses, rounding up and driving in cattle, and performing a rodeo. There are no women in Busch's frontier world, only men and nature. Men exhibit their strength and skill by taming animals and overcoming the elements. Although the work is hard and often dangerous, the men of the frontier value it above all else, as is explained in the jingle from one Busch commercial (17):

> *"There's no place on earth that I'd rather be*
> *Than out in the open where it's all plain to see*
> *If it's going to get done it's up to you and me . . ."*

The commercial asks the viewer to "head for the mountains (of Busch Beer)" and beer is shown as the reward for the cowboy's labor. In the ad, a six pack of Busch is pulled out of clear running water as the voiceover tells us to "head for the beer brewed natural as a mountain stream." In addition to serving as a reward, beer functions as a natural product of the frontier setting, and as a symbol of the frontier. The consumption of Busch beer, then, is a symbolic reenactment of the myth of the frontier.

The myth of the frontier revolves around the purity of nature, of the untamed wilderness. The frontier is free of the corruption of civilization (and femininity), and therefore the people who inhabit it are likewise pure. Untainted by civilization, they are also unaided by it, and therefore forced to rely on themselves (as the jingle says). Thus, the frontier provides an arena for a man to prove unequivocally his masculinity. In such a setting a man can become purely masculine; that is why the frontiersman or cowboy is the archetypical man's man. Moreover, the purity of the frontier is not the purity of Eden. In the frontier myth, nature is dangerous and unpredictable. One Busch commercial (30), for example, shows a

young cowboy trying to ride a bucking bull in a rodeo, while in another (37), a cowboy rescues a calf that has been swept away by the current during a river crossing. Nature, representing the untamed, provides the perfect challenge to the man's man, who expresses his masculinity by dominating his environment.

Beer is woven into the myth of the frontiersman in several ways. First, it is depicted as the drink of true frontiersmen — the most masculine of all men. Second, beer itself is identified with nature; the commercial states that the components of beer are natural and that the process of brewing is natural. (This relationship is also established in the advertising for other brands, such as Rolling Rock (36) and Heileman's Old Style (12).) Therefore, beer shares the characteristics of other natural objects depicted, and may function in the same way in a man's life. In the story of the river crossing (37), for example, the river overcomes a calf, but the cowboy is able to withstand the force of the current and come to the rescue. The voiceover says, "Sometimes a simple river crossing isn't so simple . . . And when you've got him back it's your turn . . . Head for the beer brewed natural as a mountain stream . . ." If beer is natural in the same way that a stream is natural, then beer is also a force of nature, like the river. In other words, it is a challenge to be overcome, a method of proving one's masculinity. The symbol of Busch beer, a horse rearing on its hind legs, presents the same relationship between beer and nature. Beer is something like taming a frontier, which is the ultimate expression of masculinity. Those who live on the frontier do both. And even if the frontier is closed to most men, they may still reenact this myth and demonstrate their masculinity through the ritual of beer consumption.

Old Milwaukee Beer: Man and Nature on the Leisure Frontier

The advertisements for Old Milwaukee (6, 7, 8, 38) represent an updated frontier, one in which nature is no longer a work environment, but a place for leisure activities. Instead of the plains and mountains of the Old West, the Old Milwaukee settings feature water: the Florida Everglades; Snake River, Wyoming; Lafitte, Louisiana; and Glacier Bay, Alaska. Women appear in only one of the four commercials viewed (8), and are there only as spectators and cooks. While the frontier is again shown as a masculine environment, many of the traditional elements are toned down. The

Old Milwaukee frontier is not quite as dangerous as the Busch frontier, although an alligator does appear in the Florida Everglades and the activities pictured (high speed airboating, for example) emphasize risk. Still, the men on the "leisure frontier" do not depend on the natural environment to earn their livings. Instead, they choose to come to these frontiers to have fun. They pursue recreational activities such as airboating in the Everglades, fishing in Snake River and Glacier Bay, and flat bottom boat racing in Lafitte. These activities are all associated with masculinity, requiring strength, skill and the ability to dominate the environment. Although less is at stake than in the frontier work environment, here nature again provides the proper setting for men to prove their masculinity, and to try to attain its purest ideal.

In the Old Milwaukee ads, beer is distributed after the activities, again playing the role of reward. However, the identity between nature and beer is also stressed: each commercial begins with a voiceover that ties together the specific location with the product, as in "The Florida Everglades and Old Milwaukee both mean something great to these guys." Since Old Milwaukee and the special place are portrayed as being nearly identical in the minds of the characters, beer drinking is presented as a potential surrogate for the acting out of the masculine role in a natural environment. Beer, along with the special place, is also presented as a medium or milieu for male bonding. The specialness of the occasion and of the group of friends is underlined by the final words of each commercial, each time uttered by one of the participants: "Guys, it doesn't get any better than this." This remark seems to refer to both the beer and nature. Both are shown as facilitators of male-bonding, reinforcing the identity between beer and nature and the close relationship among beer, nature and male-bonding under the rubric of the myth of masculinity. ❑

Summary: Myths, Men and Beer

As the preceding section of this report indicates, television commercials for beer associate beer and beer-drinking with several different sets of beliefs, attitudes, and values that are deeply embedded in American culture and history. Each of these sets of values and beliefs, and its associated imagery, is what we have called here a "myth" of American culture — a framework for organizing meanings and feelings that is so taken for granted that we have forgotten its cultural and historical origins and assume it is simply "the way things are." One such structure of beliefs, values, and images in the commercials analyzed here, for example, is the myth of the frontier. Embedded and articulated in a thousand cultural sources, from church hymns and national anthems celebrating the courage of the pilgrims, to Western movies and television programs like "Bonanza," to "Star Trek" ("Space: the final frontier") and **Star Wars** and even **Crocodile Dundee**, images of the frontier are associated with a host of vague but deeply-felt ideas and ideals: the challenge of the unknown, the bravery of those who pit themselves almost barehanded against the hazards of untamed lands, the beauty and danger of nature, the futility of book-learning and cultured ways against the wilderness, the native wisdom and trustworthiness of simple, untutored men, the courage and independence of those who cut their ties to the past to forge their own, new path in uncharted spaces. Also included in the myth of the frontier is the American romance with the outlaw: the man who defies the encroachments of civilization, with all its confusions and complexities, and lives by his own lights, his own simpler and cleaner moral code. For the most part, his is a code based on the autonomy of the individual, the primacy of physical needs, and a respect for the most elementary forms of social organization: trust between comrades, protectiveness toward women, children, and the physically weak, rejection of all forms of industrialized authority. A recent television commercial for Fosters beer (which aired too late for analysis here) gives special emphasis to the "outlaw" theme in the mythology of the frontier. In it, Paul Hogan, in his role as "Crocodile Dundee" is handed a full mug of beer in a saloon. As he

brings it longingly toward his mouth, he comments, "Of course, you can't drink the beer in a commercial." Pause. "How long have we to go?" "Five seconds, mate," calls a voice off-camera. Dundee looks into the camera and orders, "Fade to black." The screen does, and in the next shot we see a hand set down the now near empty mug, then a close-up of Dundee, licking his lips and winking to the viewer. To the frontier hero, the rules and laws of complex bureaucracies are made for other, weaker, characters than himself. Where they come into conflict with his own needs and sense of rightness, they are to be evaded, cast aside, or as a last resort, subverted.

Beer commercials do their work by associating their products with just such powerful myths and themes as these: the frontier, the common man, the American dream. Through such repeated associations, beer and beer drinking become part of the myths in which they are embedded, and invoke the same feelings, beliefs, and values.

Advertisers do not invent the cultural myths and themes in which they embed their products. Rather, they select those most congruent with the product to be sold and the audience assumed to be its major "market." In the case of beer, the link between myth and market is the theme of masculinity. At least until very recently, American beer advertisers have targeted their commercials to a predominantly male market. The myths featured in beer commercials, consequently, are predominantly masculine myths — or at least, focus on the masculine version of the myth enacted. (There is, after all, a feminine version of the myth of the frontier which centers on the ideal role and character of women, but this version did not appear in the commercials we analyzed.) Thus, beer commercials can be viewed, as a whole, as a mythology of American masculinity — a manual of cultural information on what it means to be a man. Of course, beer commercials are not the only source of such information. But they do provide answers to a set of questions about masculinity in our culture — questions such as: What kinds of things do men do, and what do they value? How do men relate to each other? How do they relate to women? What kinds of settings do men prefer? And how do boys become men?

The answers beer commercials give to these questions are, of course, highly selective — just as are the myths in which the answers are embedded. But they are also very consistent and, taken as a whole, offer a well-integrated set of lessons to young viewers

on how to be a man. And beer, of course, plays a major role in each lesson. Just how it does, we have tried to indicate below.

What kinds of things do men do and value?

In the world of the beer commercial, men work — hard. And they play — hard. For the most part, men's labor is physical: moving pianos, felling trees, loading hay, welding beams, rounding up horses. But the key to work is the challenge it poses — whether to physical strength or endurance, to patience and craftsmanship, or to wit and competitive drive in the white-collar marketplace. Although there are intimations in the commercials that hard work is the route to economic success, the men pictured do not labor primarily out of economic necessity or for financial gain. They work for the pride of accomplishment provided by a difficult job well done, for the respect and camaraderie of other men (few women are visible in the workplaces pictured), for the benefit of family, community, and nation, and for the opportunity to demonstrate masculinity by triumphing over the challenges work provides.

Beer is integrated with the world of work and the values it represents in three ways. First, beer is represented, in some commercials, as the product of patient, skillful craftsmanship. Thus, it partakes of the virtues associated with the labor that produced it. Second, beer serves as the reward for a job well done, and the symbol of other men's respect for the accomplishment of the worker. And third, it serves as the marker of the end of the work day, the signal of "quittin' time," the means for making the transition from work to leisure. In this role, beer functions as an element of ritual, much like the saying of grace and the breaking of bread function in the ritual of mealtime. The consumption of beer makes the end of the work day official; opening the can represents the opening of leisure time.

The men of beer commercials fill their leisure time in two ways: in active pursuits usually conducted in outdoor settings (e.g., boat racing, fishing, camping, sports) and in "hanging out," usually in bars. As it is in work, the key to men's active play is the challenge it provides to physical and emotional strength, endurance and daring. Some element of danger is often present in the challenge (e.g., in high-speed boat and car racing), for danger magnifies the risks of failure and the significance of success. Movement and speed are valued not only for the increased risk they pose, but because they

require immediate and decisive action and fine control over one's own responses — one of the characteristics that separate the strong from the weak.

When they are not engaged in physical activity, the men of beer commercials frequently seek out symbolic challenges and dangers by playing games such as poker and pool and by watching basketball, football, and other competitive sports. Poker and pool pose particular challenges to **self** control, and spectator sports allow one to participate vicariously in the drama of challenge, risk, and triumph.

Even when they are merely "hanging out" together — passing time in conversation around a table in a bar — men engage in verbal jousts that contain a strong element of challenge, either in the form of good-natured arguments or of "ribbings" of one another that test self-control and the ability to "take it."

The central theme of masculine leisure activity in beer commercials, then, is challenge, risk and mastery — mastery over nature, over technology, over others in good-natured "combat," and over self. And beer is integrated into this theme in two ways, one obvious, the other far more subtle. At the overt level, beer functions in leisure activities as it does in work: as a reward for challenges successfully overcome (the race completed, the big fish landed, the safe harbor reached). But it may also serve another function, never explicitly alluded to in commercials. In several ways, drinking in itself is a test of mastery. Because alcohol affects judgement and slows reaction time, it intensifies the risks inherent in movement and speed, and thereby increases the challenge they represent. And because it threatens self-control, drinking poses heightened opportunities for demonstrating self-mastery. Thus, beer is not merely a reward for the successful meeting of a challenge in masculine work and leisure, but is itself an occasion for demonstrating mastery, and thus enacting the ideals of masculinity.

How do men relate to each other?

In the world of beer commercials, men are rarely to be found in solitary pursuits, and only occasionally in one-to-one relationships — usually involving father and son or mentor and protegé. The dominant social context for male interaction is the group, and teamwork and group loyalty rank high in the list of masculine values. Individualism and competition, by contrast, are down-

played, and are acceptable only so long as they foster the cohesiveness of the group as a whole.

Although differences in status may exist between members of the group and outsiders, within the group no one is considered better than anyone else. In other words, men disdain elitism and intellectualism. This reflects the American value of egalitarianism, and solidifies the importance of the group over individual members. The concept of group loyalty is also extended to community and to country, so that patriotism is also presented as an important value for men.

The emotional tenor of relationships among men in beer commercials is characterized by self-restraint. Generally, strong emotions are eschewed, particularly overt displays of affection. In the workplace, mutual respect is exhibited, but respect must be earned through ability and attitude. In leisure situations, humor is a major element in male interactions. Conversations between men emphasize joking, bragging, storytelling and good-natured insults. As we noted earlier, the insults are a form of symbolic challenge; taking a ribbing in good spirit is a demonstration of one's emotional toughness and self-mastery. By providing a controlled social context for the exchange of challenges and demonstrations of ego strength and self-control, the group provides continuous reinforcement of the members' masculinity. Moreover, gathering in groups provides men with the freedom to act somewhat irresponsibly; that is groups allow men to act like boys.

In the commercials analyzed, beer serves several important functions in promoting group solidarity. Drinking is frequently the shared activity that brings the group together, and in at least one set of commercials, a shared beer is the reminder of a group's history and identity. Thus beer is symbolic of group membership. It also serves as the means for demonstrating the group's egalitarian values. When one man gives a beer to another, it is a sign of acceptance, respect, and friendship. In this role, beer is also a substitute for overt displays of affection.

It is worth noting here that the emphasis commercials place on beer drinking as a group activity undermines the idea that it is in any way problematic. One of the more widespread stereotypes of the problem drinker is that he is a solitary and secretive loner. The stress on the group in the commercials plays on the common misconception that beer drinking, when it is done socially and publicly, cannot be harmful.

How do men relate to women?

As in their interactions with other males, the men in beer commercials do not display strong emotions in male-female relationships, but are confident, cool, and detached, even when their intentions are clearly romantic. For her part, the woman may signal her availability and interest, but she must wait for the man to take the lead. Once the ice is broken, she may take the initiative on occasion, but for the most part the man remains dominant. He keeps the upper hand in the relationship because he is able to divide his attention, e.g., between the woman, other men in the situation, and his beer, while the woman is only concerned with the man.

In amorous or seductive relationships pictured in the commercials, beer serves several functions. It is represented as a means of signaling availability and interest, of winning the attention and favors of women, and of facilitating romance, presumably through its power to lower inhibitions and create a mellow and dream-like mood.

When the commercials depict more established relationships between men and women, the focus shifts from romance and seduction to male activities in which women are reduced largely to the role of admiring onlookers. Men appear to value their group of friends over their female partners, and the women accept this. The women of beer commercials tend to be passive, watching men perform physical tasks but not participating in them. In other words, they become the audience for whom men perform. For the most part, women know their place and do not interfere with male-bonding. They may, however, act as emotional catalysts for male-bonding, bringing men together. Occasionally, a woman may be found together with a group of men, presumably as the girlfriend or wife of one of the group members. Here, the presence of women, and their non-interference, indicates their approval of masculine activity and male-bonding, and their approval of the role of beer in these situations. Even when a group of men acts irresponsibly and/or boyishly, the presence of a woman shows that this behavior is socially sanctioned. In general, although there are some signs of changing attitudes towards women in the commercials, for the most part the traditional roles of masculinity and femininity are upheld.

What kinds of settings do men prefer?

In the world of beer commercials, the settings most closely

associated with masculinity are the natural environment and the self-contained world of the modern drinking-hall — the bar. Nature is featured prominently as both a workplace and a setting for leisure activity. As a workplace, the natural environment provides suitable challenge and danger, and the separation from civilization forces men to rely only on themselves. The height of masculinity can be attained when the natural environment and the work environment coincide, that is, when men have to overcome nature in order to survive. This is a major element in the traditional myth of the frontier. Other work environments, such as the farm, factory, and office, offer their own form of challenge, but physical danger is usually downplayed and the major risk is economic. Challenge and danger are also reduced, but still present, when nature is presented as a leisure environment. However, male-bonding receives greater emphasis when nature is the setting for play, and the freedom that nature provides becomes the freedom for men to behave in a boyish manner.

In beer commercials, nature is closely associated with both masculinity and beer. Beer is identified as a product that is natural and pure, implying that its consumption is not harmful, and perhaps even healthy. Because it is presented as equivalent with nature, beer can also be seen as a substitute for nature, an alternate way to demonstrate one's masculinity when the natural environment is not available. Finally, although drinking is not explicitly portrayed as a challenge in its own right in the commercials, the identification of beer with nature supports the notion that excessive consumption of beer provides a suitable test of mastery through which masculine strength can be demonstrated. For if beer is identified with nature, and nature is valued not only for its beauty but for its peril and, therefore, its opportunities to test one's fortitude and self-mastery, then beer may be seen as posing a similar challenge, and heavy drinking, a similar reward: the respect of other men for one's ability to hold one's own.

As a setting for masculine activity, the bar runs a close second to nature, and many commercials seem to advertise bar patronage as much as they do a particular brand of beer. Of course, the drinking hall has a venerable history in Western culture as a center for male socializing and tests of skill and strength. It is the setting for much of the action in **Beowolf**, for example, and even before that, in the sagas of ancient Greece. The saloon serves much the same function in American film sagas of the West, and is so thoroughly embedded in the myth of the frontier that it is the setting for one of

the most engaging episodes in the space-western, **Star Wars**. Like its predecessors, the bar of the beer commercial is represented as a male-dominated environment, although it sometimes serves as a setting for male-female interaction. And it is generally portrayed as a relaxed and comfortable context for male socializing, as well as a place where a man can find entertainment and excitement.

Unlike the drinking halls and saloons of earlier sagas, however, the bars of beer commercials are represented as totally self-contained environments — closed systems in which people are rarely seen entering and never leaving. The scene is always set in the middle of the action, never at its beginning or its end, and what goes on in the bar never spills over into the street. There are, in short, no consequences to what men do in bars, and this heightens their appeal as places where one may behave irresponsibly.

It is worth noting here that many of the settings featured as drinking-places in beer commercials, whether remote outdoor sports or bars with no discernible locations, are probably places that people would drive to — and drive away from. Because the action is confined to the settings where it occurs, however, the question of how people arrived and how they will get home never comes up, and the potentially deadly consequences of drinking and driving are carefully avoided.

How do boys become men?

In the world of beer commercials, boys become men by earning acceptance from those who are already full-fledged members of the community of men. These are generally identified by their age, their size, their celebrity, their positions of authority in the work world, and/or their status in a bar. To earn acceptance, the younger man must demonstrate that he can do the things men do: take risks, meet challenges, face danger courageously, and dominate his environment. In the workplace, he demonstrates this by seizing opportunities to work, taking pride in his labor and product, proving his ability, persisting in the face of uncertainty, and learning to accept failure with equanimity. In a bar, he demonstrates his readiness to enter the world of men by following the rules of barroom etiquette, displaying familiarity with brands of beer, and showing decisiveness in ordering. Thus, bars and workplaces complement each other as environments in which initiation into adulthood can be consummated. And initiation is symbolized and celebrated, of course, through the sharing of a beer. 50

Conclusions

There is no question that television plays a significant role in the shaping of children's social learning and behavior, and that commercials constitute a major part of the television "curriculum" on American cultural meanings, values, and expectations. In the years between birth and the age at which they are legally permitted to drink and drive, American children see close to one million television commercials. At a conservative estimate, roughly 100,000 of them are commercials promoting beer. But beer is only part of what they promote. Television commercials work by associations — associations between their products and the fears, hopes, and beliefs of the intended purchasers; and associations among those, the product, and larger and deeper themes and patterns of meaning and value in the culture's history. In the case of beer commercials, the nexus of those associations is the theme of masculinity. Images and ideals of masculinity are what link the product to the intended purchaser, and also what guide the selection of the myths in which beer is embedded and given cultural meaning.

Along with beer and beer drinking, then, beer commercials promote a particular view of what it means to be a man. In the preceding pages, we have detailed what that view is, on the basis of the commercials analyzed. Here, we want to offer some additional observations, generalizations, and judgements.

The first point that must be noted is that the beer commercial "man" is, of course, a stereotype — or rather a composite of stereotypes, and a highly selective "composite" at that. We found no sensitive men in beer commercials — nor any thoughtful men, scholarly men, political men, gay men, or even complex men. We found only one-dimensional men — which is, of course, what stereotypes are. And matching them were one-dimensional women. Quite apart from the **content** of the stereotypes that predominate in the commercials, their use as the primary means of instructing the viewer is a hazard to health — particularly the intellectual health of the young, whose habits of thought are a matter of even graver concern to the future of their own (and others') survival than are the

habits of drinking and driving they are being prepared to acquire.

The second point concerns the content of the stereotypes of men and women presented in the commercials analyzed. As a set, they seem to us almost laughably anachronistic — in particular, the men of the West, the super-studs of Colt 45, and the passive, silent, male-centered women. But perhaps these reflect a deep-seated conservatism in the American character, or in the advertising agencies that generated them, or in the beliefs of advertising agencies about the consumers of beer. In any case, these seem a peculiar set of figures to offer the young of the 1980's as models of adult females and males. As for the ideals and values represented in most of the stereotypes, judgements of their worth in educating children to be humane and decent people and citizens will no doubt differ widely from group to group. Taking pride and finding meaning in one's work is a value to which few Americans would voice objection, we suspect, and patriotism stirs concerns in only a slightly larger number (including ourselves). But the stress laid on physical challenge, risk-taking, and the courting of danger as masculine ideals would no doubt trouble many, and we can imagine only a few who would fail to find the frank sexual exploitation and contempt for women of the Colt 45 commercials offensive.

The third point concerns the association promoted in these commercials between the ideals of masculinity represented and the consumption of beer. Here we want merely to stress the conclusion already intimated in the preceding section: almost without exception, the commercials analyzed promote the view that to be a real man in American culture — and accepted among other men — one must drink beer. Beer is represented as the medium through which one demonstrates one's masculinity, is initiated into the adult world, communicates with other men, expresses feelings towards them, preserves and recaptures the history of one's group of male friends, and makes romantic contacts with women. Beer is represented, in short, as an essential element in masculinity, so that the one cannot be attained without the other. In our view, this is a powerful, distorted, and dangerous message to broadcast to young people and should, all by itself, be a cause for review of public policies governing television advertising for beer — its relationship to the more specific problems of drinking and driving aside.

But that leads us to our major subject here, and the question by which this research was motivated. We said earlier that along with

beer and beer drinking, beer commercials, through their associations, represent a particular view of what it means to be a man. But in doing so, they may unintentionally promote other associations as well. Does the link in beer commercials between masculinity and beer drinking also promote an association between beer drinking and driving?

On the basis of the analyses reported here, we conclude that the answer to that question is "Yes." Beer commercials do promote an association between drinking and driving, and it is an association that reflects and propagates values and attitudes implicated in drunk driving, as well. They do this in several different ways, the most consistent of which are summarized below.

First, beer commercials link drinking and driving explicitly through the juxtaposition of images of and references to beer with images of moving cars — sometimes traveling at high speeds. They also link references to the pleasures of beer to the pleasures of driving.

Second, beer commercials make a more general connection, in their imagery, between beer and the challenge and excitement of speed.

Third, beer commercials represent as attractive and desirable such characteristics of "masculine" behavior as risk-taking, challenge-seeking, and disregard for the destructive or potentially dangerous consequences of one's actions.

Fourth, beer commercials imply both that beer consumption is a challenge through which self-control can be tested, and that risk-taking is enhanced (and therefore a better test of manhood) when control is most fragile.

Fifth, by omitting any references to drinkers' conditions and modes of transportation when leaving the setting where beer is consumed, beer commercials imply that drinking has no consequences — or at least, no consequences that are cause for concern.

There is another way in which beer commercials on television communicate the "message" that the consumption of beer is harmless, but that "message" is not to be found in the **content** of this or any other set of specific advertisements. Instead, it is implied by the fact that beer commercials appear on television at all. Since such potentially hazardous products as liquor and cigarettes may not be

advertised on television, the broadcasting of beer commercials constitutes a meta-message to the effect that beer-consumption is innocuous.

Recommendations

We believe the conclusions of this study warrant our strong recommendation that the policy permitting the televising of commercials for beer be revised to prohibit such commercials. Failing that, we would recommend amendment of the present policy to include restrictions on the permissible content of beer commercials. At best, television beer commercials should be restricted to product identification. At the least, they should be prohibited from the use of images of automobiles, racetracks, speedboats, and other references to driving and speed in connection with their products.

Such changes in policy would not, of course, eliminate the associations among masculinity, beer, and driving in the American mind, or even in the materials to which children have easy access. Such associations are deeply woven into the images and practices of the culture and are given expression in dozens of ways. But restrictions on televised beer commercials would eliminate at least one potent source through which such associations are propagated, and perhaps provide a space where other, more varied, and less damaging learnings might take place.

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